

Montgomery County Early Care Education Congress Action Agenda



help me grow

Montgomery County has a strong tradition of supporting high quality early care and education to promote school readiness. Building on this history and on the County's *2000 Early Childhood Comprehensive Plan*, Montgomery County was identified as a site for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Leadership in Action Program (LAP) in 2007. Montgomery County LAP (MCLAP) participants engaged more than 20 community partners from the public and private sector of the early care and education community to focus on a single outcome "all Montgomery County children will enter school fully ready to learn."

As a result, MCLAP developed a *Draft Action Agenda* and launched the *Early Care and Education Congress* to engage as many stakeholders as possible to refine the Action Agenda and mobilize the entire early childhood community to focus on all children entering school fully ready to learn. Ultimately the Congress will serve as an organizing body -- aligning the work of the early care and education community.

The first **Montgomery County Early Care and Education Congress (MCECEC)** was held on April 18, 2008 with more than 100 attendees for the first public announcement on the *Action Agenda's* preliminary goals and action steps. In addition, 239 early childhood stakeholders completed the online survey noting their comments, impressions and general feedback to the *draft*. As a result of this community input, new action steps, ideas and perspectives were incorporated into the draft. With the understanding that this is a living document of the early childhood community, we now present the **Early Care and Education Congress's Action Agenda** to guide our work from this point forward. We welcome further input on the agenda and involvement in the work groups that will continue to refine and shape the agenda.

The **Montgomery County Early Care and Education Congress (MCECEC)** will continue to engage new partners and leaders to implement the *Action Agenda* and meet periodically to coordinate efforts in the early childhood community. It is our hope that the MCECEC Action Agenda will serve as a broad framework to allow the early childhood community and its partners to identify, individually and collectively, where they may contribute most effectively to the result of ensuring all young children are ready for school.

*You hold an integral role in this process and work. As a champion of Montgomery County's youngest residents and a supporter of a family-focused early childhood service delivery system, it is our hope that you will **sign on** and make every effort to do your part. Help us to continue on this path toward success and our commitment to the children and families of Montgomery County.*

You can sign on to the Montgomery County Early Care and Education Congress and demonstrate your support and commitment to implementing the Action Agenda by completing and returning the "Statement of Support" form on the last page.



The Action Plan

Goal 1: *Everyone in Montgomery County will understand the need to support school readiness and their role in preparing children for school.*

Rationale: When people understand the value of early care and education to learning and life, they will support activities and programs that promote school readiness. The actions below are designed to increase public awareness, enhance parents' role as their child's first and best teacher, and engage public support for these initiatives.

Recommended Action Steps

1. Engage and Empower Parents and Caregivers

- ☑ Expand “help me grow” public engagement efforts to reach new audiences by ensuring information is shared in multiple languages, supporting presentation of information and materials, and participating in activities/events.
- ☑ Under the “help me grow” umbrella, create and distribute materials to educate parents and the general public using a variety of media outlets and in languages other than English.
- ☑ Make information about parenting, child development and community resources easily available to all parents and caregivers.
- ☑ Create opportunities for all parents and caregivers to engage in school readiness activities, wherever children are.
- ☑ Include parents in decision making and development of outreach and activity planning.
- ☑ Make special and priority efforts to engage new partners and leaders to participate in the Montgomery County Early Care & Education Congress, especially parents and members of minority communities.
- ☑ Conduct targeted outreach to actively engage minority populations, and to communicate the value of high quality early care and education settings.

2. Educate and Obtain the Commitment of Policy Makers and Business Leaders

- ☑ Educate elected officials, policy makers and business leaders about the value of early care and education and its link to school readiness using the “help me grow” public engagement materials.
- ☑ Ensure that specific advocacy and education efforts aimed at elected officials will include garnering their support for increased training opportunities for providers.
- ☑ Pursue cost-benefit analyses of prevention and early intervention strategies.
- ☑ Ensure that materials for elected officials and business leaders clearly articulate the positive returns on investing early in high quality programs for all children, particularly those who are most vulnerable.
- ☑ Develop a Legislative Agenda that is developed and adopted at the local level and promoted at the state level based on the recommendations of the Montgomery County Early Care & Education Congress.
- ☑ Identify leaders who will talk with elected officials about the importance of investing in early care and education. Make special effort to identify parents and “corporate champions” willing to talk with elected officials about early care and education.
- ☑ Advocate for the expansion of effective early childhood and family support services to targeted populations by participating in writing grants, lobbying /advocating, etc.
- ☑ Keep policy makers informed on the status of Universal Preschool and Community-based Pre-Kindergarten.

Goal 2: *All children, birth through age 5, will have access to high quality and culturally competent early care and education programs and health services that meet the needs of families, especially low-income families, families with children with disabilities and English language learners.*

Rationale: The data show that children who participate in high quality early care and education programs and services are more ready for kindergarten than those children who do not participate in high quality programs.

Recommended Action Steps

1. Improve Early Childhood Program Effectiveness

- ☑ Promote evidenced based practices.
- ☑ Identify and fund programs that achieve the best outcomes for young children.
- ☑ Increase the availability of onsite early childhood mental health consultations for all family child care, center child care, pre-kindergarten classrooms and other group settings.

2. Promote Access to High Quality Programs by Eliminating Barriers

- ☑ Solicit parent input and possible solutions/strategies.
- ☑ Analyze barriers and develop strategies to address them.
- ☑ Promote improvements to the child care subsidy system that will support families' ability to access high quality early care and education programs and services such as reducing parent co-pays.
- ☑ Encourage outreach to low-income families, families with children with disabilities and English language learners to increase their involvement in high quality early care and education programs and services.
- ☑ Enhance family involvement and support in early childhood programs.
- ☑ Ensure that schools are ready for ALL children.
- ☑ Promote the provision of service and program information, both verbal and written, in languages beyond English and Spanish.
- ☑ Advocate for equitable salaries and benefits for all members of the early care and education workforce based on education and experience.
- ☑ Promote communication and coordination among parents, child care, early intervention and school staff to foster smooth transitions and collaboration as children grow.

3. Promote Access to Health Care for Pregnant Women and Young Children

- ☑ Promote comprehensive health and wellness screenings and services as a part of all quality early childhood programs.
- ☑ Work in concert with existing public and private health services and providers.
- ☑ Encourage each pediatrician to have a staff member who is involved with the early care and education community-wide efforts.
- ☑ Promote good health and nutrition among families with young children as part of overall well-being.



Goal 3: *All professionals, who work with children birth to age five and their families, will be appropriately educated in promoting and understanding a comprehensive approach to the development of the whole child, including physical, social-emotional and cognitive well-being as a basis for school readiness.*

Rationale: Early experiences, environment and healthy development determine whether a child's brain will provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning. Programs and policies that ensure a well trained and highly skilled early care and education workforce are imperative. The need for ongoing, relevant training and professional development for early care and education staff, health practitioners and families is constant, and the demand for high-quality professional development and training far outweighs the supply.

Recommended Action Steps

Strengthen the Professional Development System for Those Working with Young Children

- ☑ Implement a quality professional development system through continuing coordination and expanding education, credentialing, technical assistance, and training in collaboration with training institutions, academic institutions, and other organizations.
- ☑ Create greater partnership opportunities among training organizations to expand professional development and to align practices, especially in school readiness.
- ☑ Promote program accreditation and best practices in school readiness, including the role of play in the curriculum and the importance of parent involvement.
- ☑ Ensure training for cultural competency so staff may work effectively with diverse populations, including ethnic groups, low-income families and English language learners.
- ☑ Expand pool of well-trained early childhood professionals, including opportunities for those who are English language learners or not currently working in regulated settings.
- ☑ Provide incentives such as free and low-cost trainings for formal and informal caregivers to participate in opportunities for skill building.
- ☑ Expand opportunities for health professionals to learn about developmental “red flags” that warrant referral to early intervention services.
- ☑ Use technology to increase access to information about early care and education.
- ☑ Expand the capacity of early care and education professionals to meet the needs of families with children with special needs.



Please indicate your individual support and/or your organizational support for the Action Agenda as appropriate:

I, _____
(Full Name)

support the goals of the Montgomery County Early Care and Education Congress Action Agenda and am committed to its implementation.

The, _____
(Organization Name)

supports the goals of the Montgomery County Early Care and Education Congress Action Agenda and am committed to its implementation.

Contact information:

Name and Title: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Please fax the completed form to 240-777-1342 or e-mail to MCECECongress@gmail.com.